DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 604 PS 016 935

AUTHOR Dzama, Mary Ann; Gilstrap, Robert L.
TITLE Providing Books for Young Children: The Role of Parents.
PUB DATE 1 May 87
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Childhood Education International (Omaha, NE, April 30-May 3, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Library Circulation; Library Collections; *Library Role; Literacy Education; *Parent Role; *Prereading Experience; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Public Libraries; School Libraries

ABSTRACT

Informal talks with teachers and head librarians, interviews with three preschool directors, and a review of literature were conducted to investigate the reasons why parents of preschool children infrequently used the public libraries available to them. Preschool directors were not surprised that only 45 percent of parents participating in a descriptive study used the public library as the primary source for books they read to their preschool children. They attributed parents' low level of library use to their relative affluence and disinclination to make the effort required to use the library. All directors provided children's books in the classroom, and made additional efforts to promote children's literacy, but none of the preschools had a library. Head librarians expressed surprise and concern about the finding of low use by parents. They suggested that services for preschool children were insufficient and briefly described their programs for preschoolers, their parents, and caregivers, as well as special programs planned for the future. Concluding discussion lists strategies and activities recommended by teachers, professional education associations, and librarians. (RH)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED287604

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

# PROVIDING BOOKS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN: THE ROLE OF PARENTS

Presentation by Mary Ann Dzama and Robert L. Gilstrap
Association of Childhood Education International
Omaha, Nebraska
May 1, 1987

## I. Introduction

Last year at this conference, we presented the results of a study involving three pre-schools in the Northern Virginia area. Our study was designed to find out what parents of pre-schoolers do to help their children get ready for a formal reading program in school. The descriptive study was done with the assistance of 157 parents of three and four year olds of varied middle income backgrounds. (See ERIC document ED 272 858/Dzama, M.A. and Gilstrap, R. for details).

One of the findings from the study that surprised us resulted in the current follow-up study that we are sharing with you at today's session. When we asked the parents to tell us the primary source for securing books to read to their pre-school children, only 45% indicated "the public library". When asked what they did to serve as a reading model for their child or children, 45% selected the choice "going to the public library." We presume this 45% of the population of the study answered both of the questions with the library in mind.

PS 016935

This response peaked our interest. Why weren't more parents utilizing public libraries? We consider the public library system to be a tremendous resource for knowledge and entertainment. Therefore, we decided to try to get some answers that would help us better understand why the parents of these nursery school children were not using the library and how we could help parents to do a better job of selecting books and utilizing them.

To accomplish our goal, we talked first informally with teachers and librarians to gain some insights. These talks indicated that others



"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Mary Ann Dzama
Robert L. Gilstrap
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

perceived a need to better educate parents about the valuable resource role of the public library. Next we interviewed the three pre-school directors involved in our study (Mary Ann did that) and the two librarians who served the communities in which the pre-schoolers live (Bob did that). We both researched the ERIC and research literature to see what the "experts" recommend to teachers and librarians. Today, we'll share the results of the interviews, some recommended activities, and finally, provide you with some time for questions and answers and an opportunity to share what you are doing.

II. Interview Questions and responses of the three pre-school directors

**Question I.** Were you surprised to read that 45% of the parents utilized the public library?

All three said: "No."

Why?

**Responses:**

Director A: "No, because these parents are too busy or don't have the time to think about doing one more weekly task. They already have household chores, shopping, sports, etc. to do."

Director B: "These parents have enough money to purchase the books they want to read or that their child/children want at the bookstore and don't have to deal with returning it."

Director C: " I agree with Director B, these parents can afford to purchase the books, don't like dealing with 'returning' books and in my setting choose books on parenting, attend workshops, courses or conferences if time permits or do nothing at all (let the pre-school teachers do it). Remember, these parents are older (early thirties and older), have single child by choice and make choices about parenting according to their needs."

**Question II:** Why do you feel parents aren't using the public library?

**Responses:**

All three said: "Time factor. The effort and hassle to go to the library may not be worth it."

Director C added: "They haven't thought about the use of the public library as an important factor or experience to foster with their child, since they provide the pre-school experience. Typically what happens is that their child hears a story or about a book in the pre-school, comes home and talks about it, and the parents begin searching the bookstores for it. They purchase the book for the child's personal library to be read at his/her command."

**Question III:** What is done in your pre-school site to help parents understand their role in educating their child?

**Responses:**

All three said "We have childrens' books available for the children in the classroom, but not 'a school library'."

Director A added: "We read to the children regularly and let the parents know about the books verbally. Also, we answer any questions parents ask us about parenting, books, etc."

Director B added: "We do a variety of things such as":

1. We have some workshops/lectures as parents request them. (The parents pay a fee to hear the speaker).
2. We send home a weekly newsletter that lists 4-5 book titles for each of the topics or themes that will be covered during the week. The children take the letter home on Friday and the parents know that the books listed come from the public library.

3. Occasionally parents ask for some suggestions and the teachers give them ideas.

4. A handful of parents go to the public library faithfully each week and take out books for themselves and for their child. These parents have reported doing this for the joy of reading and to provide their child the experiences the library provides."

Director C added: "We have several activities such as:

1. We have 3-5 meetings per year on a variety of themes. Parents are encouraged to attend the free sessions. At least one meeting a year is about reading/reading readiness.

2. We have a parents book club and they meet to discuss parenting. the role of parents in education, and other topics. Parents purchase their own books and share them with others later.

3. From time to time parents ask teachers for suggestions."

III. Interview Questions and responses of the two head librarians

**Question I:** What is your reaction to our findings that only 45% of the parents participating in the study utilize the public library?

**Responses:** Both librarians expressed surprise and concern. One was a bit more defensive and stated "we do everything possible to get them here."

Having felt the need to clarify my question, I explained that I was not trying to be critical but wanted to find out what some of the problems are so that I might be able to help the pre-school teachers better understand how they might work with parents.

**Question II:** Why do you feel that more parents don't use the library?

**Responses** both librarians made were:

1. Some libraries in our county are too crowded because this area has grown so rapidly and there aren't enough books available for all the parents of pre-schoolers to use.

2. A new library is opening soon to help with this problem.
3. Some books specifically designed for pre-schoolers -- especially the very young (children) -- are too fragile for libraries to have available (for example, books made of cloth, those published in accordian style, etc.)
4. The Summer Library program is geared for school age children; therefore, there aren't many books available for pre-schoolers.
5. Our county (Fairfax County, VA) is a very affluent area so there is the tendency for parents to buy rather borrow books. (USA Today recently published a graph that indicated a significant increase in the purchase of children's books).

**Question III:** What kind of programs do you have for pre-schoolers and their parents or caregivers?

**Responses** from both included:

1. Story Times for 3-5 year olds
2. Special Activities for 3-5 year olds such as: puppet shows; "Thrills of Spring" - a mini-series with stories, fingerplays and crafts.
3. "Pops and Tots" for 2 year olds and their fathers on a weekday or Saturday.
4. Special Activities for 2 year olds such as: "Times for 2's" with songs and activities for children and parents and bedtime story hours.
5. Outreach programs at local daycare centers

**Question IV:** Are your programs successful?

**Responses** from both concluded that all the programs were very successful. Both felt they usually had the optimum number, depending upon the activity.

However, if the programs were specifically designed only for parents, the programs had been less successful than those designed for parents and children or children alone.

**Question V:** What special programs are planned for the future?

**Responses** from both were enthusiastic about some new projects such as the "small one-ders" program at one of the library branches. It was a one day program for parents or caretakers of children ages 18 - 23 months. The library aimed at parents to give them a better understanding of the wealth of material available for them about libraries, books and babies.

They also reported that they were conducting more activities at community functions that draw parents and which provide an opportunity for distribution of information about selecting books, etc. for children.

IV. **Recommended Activities**

Teachers and professional education associations recommend the following strategies and activities:

1. Sharing newsletters that are either locally produced or nationally published
2. Programs, public announcements about the importance of the parenting role for ads on paper bags, milk cartons, or fliers.
3. Informing parents of T.V. specials, such as "Drop Everything and Read."
4. Keeping up-to-date with materials from professional associations. The International Reading Association has publications for parents such as Children's Book Choices published yearly; pamphlets about a variety of topics and the journal The Reading Teacher. ACEI has a newsletter and the journal Childhood Education that have articles for parents. NCTE (National Council of Teachers of

English) publishes Language Arts and articles useful for parents are in each issue.

5. Investigate county government agencies such as Human Resources Offices that share resources with parents.

6. Investigate public school divisions which have Adult Education Programs through the Office of Adult and Community Education with evening courses for parents.

**Librarians** recommend the following activities:

1. Continue to plan developmentally appropriate activities for pre-school children like "Small One-ders" and "Twilight Story Hours." It's been said that "One father is worth more than 100 schoolmasters."
2. Continue to use and do research about these programs in order to learn which ones are more effective. For example, ERIC document ED 243 092.
3. Continue to reach out to parents and pre-school teachers by taking services and materials to them rather than expecting them to come to the library.
4. Continue making available to parents and teachers the types of free and inexpensive materials that have been designed for them on book selection and usage.

V. **Questions & Answers & Sharing**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Davis, Hazel G. "Reading Pressures in the Kindergarten" Childhood Education. Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 76-79 (1981).

Elkind, David. "Misunderstandings About How Children Learn" Today's Education. March 1972.

Manning, Maryann & Gary L Manning. "Early readers and non-readers from low socioeconomic environments: What their parents report." The Reading Teacher. Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 32-34. (1984)

Rhodes, Lynn and Mary W. Hill. "Supporting reading in the home naturally; Selected materials for parents." The Reading Teacher. Vol. 38, No. 6, pp. 619-623. (1985)

Simmons, Barbara and Paula Smith Lawrence. "Beginning Reading: Welcome Parents." Childhood Education. Vol. 57, Jan./Feb. 1981, pp. 156-158.

Vukelich, Carol. "Parents' role in the reading process: A review of practical suggestions and ways to communicate with parents." Vol. 37, No. 6, pp. 472-477. (1984)

Children's Choices. (A listing of books rated as good by children) International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., P.O. Box Box 8139, Newark, DE., 19711. Free. Send self-addressed stamped envelope (6 1/2 x 9 1/2) stamped with first class postage for two ounces.

"Choosing Good Books" from Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. Publications Dept., P.O. Box 23444, Washington, D.C. 20036. (Enclose U.S. 50 cents for postage and handling).

"News for Parents" (editor John Michlos) 6 times a year in Reading Today. International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., P.O. Box 8139, Newark, Del., 18714-8139.

Dzama, Mary Ann & Robert L. Gilstrap. Ready To Read: A Parent's Guide. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1983.

_____. "Recent Books That Meet The Needs of Young Children." Virginia English Bulletin. Vol. 28, #2, Winter 1978, pp. 50-52.

Johnson, Ferne O. "Library Services Benefit Preschoolers." Catholic Library World. Vol. 50, Dec. 1978, pp. 212-217.

Tomko, Diane Marie. "Preschool Library Experiences and Reading Readiness." ERIC Reproduction Service. ED 243 092. 1984.